

Role models and trust in socio-political institutions: a case study in Eastern Germany, 1992-96

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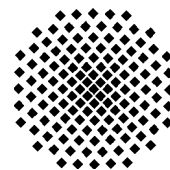
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Role Models and Trust in Socio-Political Institutions:
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A b s t r a c t: This paper discusses the development of trust in socio-political institutions on the part of youth in eastern Germany during the period 1992-96, with special emphasis on the effect of having parents as role model. The analysis is based on surveys of middle and high school students that were conducted by the authors in a county in Thuringia. A factor analysis of trust in a number of social and political institutions yielded a factor comprising five socio-political institutions that belong to the state sector and, for the most part, have a strong hierarchical structure: the military, police, legal system, public administration (but not the government proper), and parliament. Our multiple regression models (including parental role model, various political attitudes, evaluation of the economic situation, and stratification) showed that favorable attitudes towards unification and having parents as role model were the two most important determinants of having trust in socio-political institutions. The positive effects of these two variables on trust became stronger with growing temporal distance from unification during the early years of the transformation; the strength of the effects dropped slightly after 1994 but remained well above the 1992 level. These findings show that socialization variables are an important addition to situational and stratification factors in understanding the development of trust in socio-political institutions among eastern German youth.

Soziale Vorbilder von Jugendlichen und deren Vertrauen in sozio-politische Institutionen:
Eine Fallstudie in Ostdeutschland, 1992-96.

Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g: Die Studie erörtert die Entstehung des Vertrauens in sozio-politische Institutionen unter Jugendlichen in Ostdeutschland im Zeitraum 1992 bis 1996. Dabei berücksichtigt sie insbesondere Effekte, die entstehen, wenn Jugendliche ihre Eltern (oder Elternteile) als soziale Vorbilder akzeptieren. Die Analyse basiert auf Befragungen von Schülern aus Regelschulen und Gymnasien, die in einem ausgewählten Landkreis in Thüringen durchgeführt wurden. Eine Faktorenanalyse von Indikatoren des Vertrauens in mehrere soziale und politische Institutionen ermittelte einen gemeinsamen Faktor des Vertrauens in fünf sozio-politische Institutionen, die alle zum staatlichen Sektor zu rechnen sind, und die größtenteils eine stark hierarchische Struktur aufweisen: das Militär, die Polizei, das Rechtssystem, die öffentliche Verwaltung (unter Ausschluß der zentralstaatlichen Regierung) und das Parlament. Mehrere multiple Regressionsmodelle (mit unabhängigen Variablen zur Vorbildfunktion von Eltern, zu verschiedenen politischen Einstellungen, sowie zur Bewertung der ökonomischen Situation und der sozialen Schichtzugehörigkeit) zeigten, dass positive Bewertungen der staatlichen Vereinigung Deutschlands und die Akzeptanz der Eltern (oder eines Elternteils) als soziale Vorbilder die beiden wichtigsten Determinanten für das ermittelte Vertrauen in sozio-politische Institutionen waren. In den frühen Jahren der Transformation verstärkte sich der positive Einfluss dieser beiden Variablen auf das Ausmass des Institutionenvertrauens mit zunehmender Distanz vom Zeitpunkt der Wiedervereinigung, während dieser Einfluss nach 1994 leicht abfiel, aber immer noch oberhalb des 1992er Wertes verblieb. Diese Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Effekte der Sozialisation wichtige Ergänzungen zum Verständnis des Einflusses von situativen und schichtabhängigen Faktoren auf die Entstehung des Vertrauens in sozio-politische Institutionen unter ostdeutschen Jugendlichen sind.

1 Introduction¹

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany 11 months later set in motion a transformation process that is changing both former societies. This transformation is much more pronounced in eastern Germany, however, owing to the formal dissolution of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the introduction of liberal democracy to that part of Germany. No sphere of public life remained unchanged after unification, and many changes reached far into the private sphere of families, such as the modification of abortion laws.

The election in East Germany in March 1990 was the first free election in that part of Germany in almost 60 years. Eastern Germans greeted the fall of the communist regime with great joy, and they pushed for a rapid unification of the two Germanies. However, the initial euphoria disappeared within a few years as people discovered that the rebuilding of eastern Germany would take much longer than expected, and that their savings and current earnings were not always sufficient to cover the costs of a new array of competing demands. Risks increased concerning jobs, crime, and housing. Even people who were among the winners of unification might discover that others did even better than they, as most eastern Germans came to recognize that it would take them far longer than initially expected to catch up with the West.

Soon after unification, attacks on immigrants, Jews, and foreigners increased to unprecedented levels in postwar Germany. Support for extreme right-wing parties grew, and the general level of violence in eastern Germany rose several times from that which prevailed in the GDR. While xenophobic acts were committed in both eastern and western Germany, their incidence was substantially higher in the East. The vast majority of these acts were committed by youth.

Given the high likelihood that youths are the perpetrators of such acts, it is imperative to understand their political views and motives. Previous studies (e.g. Hess and Torney 1967; Dawson and Prewitt 1969; Jaros 1973; Davies 1965; 1977) have focused on the role of the family in the political socialization process of children and youth, and found the family to be a major component of political orientation.² In summarizing the findings from such studies, Jahoda (1978)

¹ We gratefully acknowledge the financial support for this research provided by the German Academic Exchange Service and the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation.

² The foundation for much of the socialization research is the classic panel study of cognitive socialization of youth by Bachman and his associates (Bachman 1970; Bachman et al. 1969; 1971; 1978). They followed 2,213 males youth over a five-year span, starting at age 16. One of their central findings was that contrary to what had been expected by those who view adolescence as a period of great turbulence and stress, we have found a good deal of consistency along dimensions of attitudes, aspirations, and self-concept" (Bachman et al. 1978:220). They add that "the dominant

stated that the family is the major transmitter of culture, including political culture. However, as children reach high-school ages, the school increasingly becomes important as a source of political orientation (Friedenberg 1973). As put by Barber, who included other institutions as contributing to the process (1983:89), "...the basic attitudes of trust...are instilled in children early in the process of political socialization that they undergo in their families, in their schools, from the mass media, and in their peer groups."

In view of the precarious social, economic and political situation during the transformation of eastern Germany, much is riding on the acceptance of and support for liberal democratic values and the existing, though nascent, democratic system. Adolescents and youth play an important role in this development, for they will be the future supporters– or opponents– of this system. A key factor for acceptance of democracy is trust in social institutions. "Long-term doubts about the trustworthiness of the political order and its institutions are incompatible with the idea of a democracy"³ (Walz, 1996a:70). Moreover, as Easton (1975) pointed out, the stability of a political system depends more on support for the political community and order than on support for political power, which can always be changed via elections. Trust in social and political institutions, therefore, is essential for the stability of a democratic system.

While much research has been carried out on social and political determinants of trust in institutions and liberal democracy, little attention has been paid to one important agent in this socialization process, namely the family. Although earlier research examined the importance of the family for political socialization, that line of inquiry has received less attention lately, and little has been done in the area of family influences on trust in political institutions.

It is the purpose of the present paper to bring these two research traditions together. The specific objectives of the paper are (1) to examine the extent to which middle and high-school students view their parents as role models; and (2) to investigate the effect of parental role models on trust in social institutions.

picture that emerges from this research is not change but stability" (1978:221). However, our research on stability of attitudes using the same data as the present study (Urban and Singelmann 1998) shows that with regard to at least xenophobic attitudes, that stability is substantially less among youth younger than 16 years of age. Since the present study analyzes trust among 13-15 year old youth, we are hesitant to draw parallels between the study by Bachman et al. and our results.

³ The original quotation is in German.

2 The Family Context of Political Socialization

Past studies of the role of the family on the political socialization of children often focused on family structure, specifically on whether or not a father was present in the household (Davies 1965; Greenstein 1965; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Lane 1959). Before the 1970s, it was the father who was expected to be better educated, more interested in politics, and who played the role of the supreme authoritarian in the house; the father, therefore, was the parent expected to pass on political attitudes and knowledge to the children living in the household. Hess and Torney (1967), for example, had warned that the absence of a father in the household might lead to a reduced influence of the family in the political socialization process of children and adolescents. Beginning in the 1960s, and continuing through the 1970s and 1980s, the structure and composition of the household changed dramatically, with more women receiving higher educational degrees, entering the work force, and becoming politically active (Bernard 1989; Gerson 1989; Gierzynski and Budreck 1995; Henslin 1989).

At the same time, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of single-parent households, at least in the United States. The impact of these changes can be seen in a recent study of political knowledge and attitudes among adolescents which found that family structure predicted very little in the way of political socialization (Dolan 1995). No effects of family structure on political efficacy, knowledge, or participation were found, and only a weak effect on political trust was uncovered. Students who reported that they grew up with their father being present in the household had somewhat more trust in the government and its political leaders than did students whose father was absent during their childhood. Dolan (1995) concluded that the political socialization of children can be provided by either father or mother and does not require the presence of both parents.

The pioneering work on socialization and the formation of political beliefs by Newcomb (cf. Alvin et al. 1991) showed that with increasing age of female students at Bennington College, parental influence on the students' socio-political orientations weakened. The Bennington Study also found that while there was a close correlation between sociopolitical orientations of parents and their offspring with regard to general political ideology, the correlations were much weaker when it came to more specific policy preferences.

Other studies have examined the acceptance of authority among young adolescents. Rigby et al. (1987), for example, focused on the connection between personal authority (parents and teachers) and more impersonal types of authority (police and the law). Their findings showed that younger school children were more accepting of authority figures than older school children, and

that pro-authority attitudes towards parents/teachers and police/laws were highly correlated, suggesting that school children do not tend to distinguish between these personal and impersonal types of authority.

The increase in right-wing extremism and xenophobic acts by adolescents in Germany after unification renewed the interest in the authoritarian personality and the relationship that children have with their parents (cf. Hopf 1993; 1992; Lederer 1983). The concept of an authoritarian personality was developed by Adorno et al. (1950) to examine the origin of authoritarian actions. A key thesis of this approach is that authoritarian adolescents tended to avoid conflicts with their parents and other persons close to them (e.g. teachers) and turn their discontent onto foreigners and marginal social groups. A major reason for the avoidance of conflicts with parents was a parental idealization on the part of children.

A more complex approach to the child-parent relationship has been made by proponents of attachment theory (cf. Main 1991; Ainsworth et al. 1978; Bowlby 1969). The basic premise of attachment theory is that individuals, and especially young children, form linkages with others that are in close proximity to self, geographically and/or culturally. According to Marris (1991), these linkages form the bridge from self to society, provide a sense of continuity to the self, and frame experiences throughout the life cycle. These frames of experience include not only cognitive scripts (ways of thinking), but affective references and mental well-being (Grossman and Grossman 1991; Raja, McGee, and Stanton 1992; Weiss 1991). When attachments are broken or threatened, individuals typically feel anxious and protest the disruption (Davies 1977; Grossman and Grossman 1991; Weiss 1991).

Much of the research on attachments has been based on young children (e.g., Bowlby 1969; Parkes, Hinde, and Marris 1991). When researchers have turned their attention to older individuals, they find much the same processes at work, though parents are no longer the only socializing agents at work. Bowlby (1969), for example, found that adolescents aim many of their attachments to groups and institutions outside the family although, as Hewitt (1989) shows, the family is still a major socializing factor. In addition, the attachments made during the developmental years, and attachment to parents during later years have been found to have an effect on political attitudes. In a study involving college students, high school students, and workers, Feshbach found that "both early and current attachments to the father are significantly correlated with patriotic feelings" (1991:223).

Another consequence of forming strong attachments early in life is the ability to form strong attachments later. Children are aware that they will be separating from their parents at some

point (Bowlby 1969), but without a strong attachment to their parents they typically encounter difficulties in forming other attachments (Davies 1977; Grossman and Grossman 1991). The inability to form strong attachments to socially approved institutions, groups, and/or individuals can lead to attachments to deviant groups and risky behavior (Bill et al. 1996; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Salts et al. 1995), though there is little research as to the strength of ties within these groups over long periods of time.

Role model theory is in many ways similar to attachment theory. Its roots can be found in reference group theory (Tomeh 1984), which rests on the basic argument that individuals need and seek out others either groups or individuals on which to model their own behaviors (Shibutani 1955). For young children, the most important role model is the parent (Goodman 1985; Rosenberg 1986), though peer groups, the mass media, and other social institutions play a large role in the socialization process throughout the life cycle (Banks and Roker 1994; Carley 1991; Hewitt 1989; Rapoport 1988; Signorielli 1990; Silbiger 1977).

The most important differences between attachment theory and the role model approach are (1) the motivational impact of the status of the person or group chosen as a role model, and (2) the importance of interaction within the relationship. It is assumed that role models are chosen because they hold a higher status than those who have chosen them (Zuckerman 1988), which provides motivation to follow the acts and advise of the role model. Advise, though, is hard to obtain from a role model that is not easily accessible, such as a movie star or professional athlete. As Tomeh (1984) has pointed out, increased interaction leads to increased communication, which in turn can influence attitudes. If the role models are easily accessible, like parents, the opportunity for interaction and communication are much greater than interaction with a celebrity or distant role model. Behavior and attitudes become more closely linked to those of the parental role model, while those with distant role models must improvise with behaviors and attitudes in situations in which the role model has not acted (e.g., Sylvester Stallone offers little guidance in his movie roles on how a person should approach political decisions prior to entering a voting booth).

Attachment theory with a focus on role models offers a framework with which to approach the influence of the family on political matters such as the trust adolescents have in social and political institutions. As we see it, there are basically two types of adolescents concerning role models: (1) those who are more secure in their attachments to their parents (and other family members such as grandparents), and have more interaction with their parental role model, which paves the way for later attachments. (2) The other type of adolescent does not see his/her parents as role models, does not have meaningful interactions with their role model, and lacks the

foundation on which to build other trusting attachments. Since it has been found that adolescents do not make a clear distinction between personal and impersonal types of authority (Rigby, Schofield, and Slee 1987), we would expect to find that adolescents who chose their parents as role models will have more trust in political institutions than adolescents with role models outside the family. Although we do not have any information about the intra-family authority structure for the sample being analyzed, we assume that students who look to their parents as role model are more likely to accept parental authority, and thereby institutional authority (Rigby, Schofield, and Slee 1987), than do students who chose non-parental role models.

This expectation is also consistent with Flacks (1971) who stated that in times of rapid social and political change, adolescents often view their parents as inadequate and/or out-of-touch role models as guides for those changes. Our data do indeed show that during the early years of the transformation, when change was much more rapid than later during the 1990s, fewer children chose their parents as role models than they did in 1994 or 1996. Those adolescents that did choose parents as role models during those times might also understand the new socio-political institutions earlier than others and exhibit trust in them.

3 Data and Variables

The analysis is based on a panel survey of middle and high-school students and their parents that was conducted by Singelmann and Urban in Holzberg, a nonmetropolitan county in eastern Thuringia, for the period 1992-96. We selected all students in grades 7 and 9 in 1992 who attended the one college-preparatory high school (*Gymnasium*) in the county, and all students of the same age in one of its three vocational-track schools (*Regelschulen*). In addition to following these students through 1996, we surveyed all 7th graders in the same schools in 1994 and 1996. For the present analysis, we selected the student population from the three waves 1992, 1994, and 1996. The restriction to these three years permits us to hold the age range of the respondents constant: for each of the three years we are analyzing adolescents who are in either the 7th or 9th grade. The senior author had received permission from the school authorities to survey the students in the class room without the presence of teachers; he distributed and collected the questionnaires that the students filled out in the classroom. The parents (both the mother and the father of each student) were surveyed in written form in the family's home.

The 1992, 1994, and 1996 surveys yielded information for 276, 296, and 308 student, respectively, but the selection of the variables for our models reduced the available data to 65.6, 56.1, and 62.7 percent. However, the relative distributions of important objective social indicators

(sex, school type, religion, age, social status of family) remained surprisingly constant. We paid special attention to the distribution of the dependent variable (trust in socio-political institutions) for all survey participants and the reduced sample for the present models. These two distributions are strikingly similar, with slightly lower levels of trust for model samples. We also carried out a logistic regression analysis trying to predict inclusion in the sample for our models. Again, the results were insignificant, suggesting that the subsamples used in our models do not differ in a statistically significant way from the full survey sample.⁴ We therefore believe that the loss of cases owing to non-response to the specific items included in our models does not produce any serious systematic skewing of the sample used for the analyses reported below.

Case studies always raise the question about the specificity of the research setting. An earlier analysis by Singelmann and Urban (1995) showed that the sample for Holzberg does not differ significantly from other eastern German samples for comparable counties; they concluded that this county is fairly typical of nonmetropolitan counties in eastern Germany. Singelmann and Weil (1997) have also shown that models of support for liberal democracy yield results for Holzberg that are similar to findings obtained for all of eastern Germany (Weil 1996). We thus believe that the results from the present case study are likely to apply to many other similarly situated counties in eastern Germany.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is trust in five social institutions that belong to the state sector and, for the most part, have a strong hierarchical structure: the military, police, legal system, public administration (but not the government proper), and parliament (Bundestag or lower house). Parliament is the one institution that does not neatly fit the description of a strong hierarchical organization, but one could make a case that parliament is a decision-making body, and, as such, exerts authority. We carried out a factor analysis using principal component analysis with no rotation. The factor loadings given in Table 1 show that the five institutions form one single factor.⁵ For a more straightforward interpretation of the results, we created an additive index for these five institutions and used alpha to further test the validity of the index. Although the range of alpha (1992=.7182, 1994=.6889, and 1996=.6769) tends to be on the low side, the relatively small sample sizes (which tend to lower the value of alpha) makes the values of alpha acceptable as

⁴ These comparison tables are available from the authors by request.

⁵ The data set also include a number of other institutions inside and outside the state sector, such as education, church, labor unions, or newspapers. However, our exploratory analyses did not show any effects of role model on any other type of social and political institution beyond the selected factor.

an indicator of the validity of the index of trust in institutional trust.

Table 1. Factor Loadings for Institutional Trust

Items	1992	1994	1996
A. Army	.59	.56	.48
B. Laws	.66	.69	.66
C. Police	.64	.65	.66
D. Parliament	.77	.77	.78
E. Public Administration	.67	.75	.71

Independent and Control Variables

Parental role model. The independent variable of interest here is parental role model. Our surveys included an open-ended question: "Who is your most important role model?"⁶ We coded these answers in a number of categories and then dichotomized the categories in terms of parents (and other family members) as role models versus other role models. Although we coded "parents", "fathers", and "mothers" as separate categories, we had too few cases for the latter two categories to keep these as separate categories. Students who stated that they had no role model are included in the non-parental category for the present analysis; however, we excluded students who left the answer blank, for we have no way of telling if this is an indication that they do not have a role model, could not decide about a role model, or did not want to answer this question. We anticipate that adolescents who consider their parents to be role models have more trust in institutions than adolescents who have other persons or no person as their role models. Research on trust in social and political institutions has identified a number of determinants of trust and democratic beliefs (Rose, 1992; Linz and Stepan, 1989; O'Donnell, 1992; Weil, 1996). Although there is disagreement about the influence of many socioeconomic factors on the development of trust in institutions (cf. Cole 1973; Walz 1996a; 1996b), we include a number of key socioeconomic factors as control variables in our models. Although we are not substantively interested in these variables, we include them in the present analysis to determine if and to what extent a consideration of parental role model, net of these traditional socioeconomic variables, enhances our understanding of trust in institutions. Unless the effects of parental role model on

⁶ While the term "role model" is fairly abstract in English, the translation "*Vorbild*" is a term commonly used (as noun, adjective, and adverb) in every day German; as such it is easily accessible to children. This was confirmed by the senior author who administered the surveys; none of the students asked what the term "*Vorbild*" meant.

institutional trust remains over and beyond those factors that have been shown to influence trust, one could not make the case about the importance to integrate family aspects into analyses of institutional trust among adolescents.

Age. Age tends to have a positive effect on trust in institutions (Aberbach and Walker 1970; Abranaval and Busch 1975; Walz 1996b). Among adolescents, however, it is more likely that the effect is the reverse, for younger children tend to be more trusting than older children (Rigsby et al. 1987; Hess and Torney 1967). We anticipate, thus, that the older the adolescents, the less trust they will have in institutions.

Sex. We have no clear expectations about the effect of sex on trust in institutions, but since female adolescents are overrepresented in our sample, we decided to include sex as an additional control variable.

Stratification and school type. There is general agreement that income and education have a positive effect on trust in institutions (Abranaval and Busch 1975; Listhaug 1984). Persons who are doing well in a society are more likely to accept and support its institutions than those who are more economically deprived and less educated. Walz (1996b) has confirmed this effect for eastern Germany since unification. We asked all respondents to place their families in terms of its socioeconomic standing on a 10-point vertical scale. We expect that the higher the placement, the more trust adolescents will have in institutions. Since most adolescents have not yet finished their education, a traditional measure of education (e.g. school completion or vocational training) is not appropriate for this population group. We instead include information about the school type attended by the adolescents. Students attending high school (Gymnasium) are much more likely to come from middle and upper class families than are students in the middle and main schools (Regelschule). Given the rigid credentialism of German vocational training, the Abitur (similar to the U.S. high school diploma) will likely lead to higher occupational status than graduation from the lower level schools. We therefore expect Gymnasium students to express more trust in institutions than students attending the Regelschule.

This variable also addresses Friedenberg's (1973) finding concerning the importance of the school which "establishes the pattern of ... subsequent assumptions as to which relations between the individual and society are appropriate." Since all adolescents attend one of two schools (*Gymnasium* or *Regelschule*), the factor "school type" can tap possible influences of the school on students' trust in institutions. While we have no objective measures of differences in curriculum, especially with regard to civics and history, it is our impression from ethnographic observations that the more discursive style of instruction at the high school is more likely to result

in an understanding of the new socio-political institutions, and thereby possibly in more trust, than the more command-style of instruction at the vocational-track school.

Interest in politics. Political alienation and lack of political efficacy have been found to decrease trust in social institutions (Abranaval and Busch 1975). Lack of interest in politics is one manifestation of political alienation. We expect that adolescents who state that they have at least some interest in politics will have more trust in institutions than those who say that they are not at all interested in politics.

Left-right ideological placement. Walz (1996b), in a comprehensive review of trust in political institutions in Germany, found that eastern Germans who identify themselves as ideologically on the right have more trust in institutions than persons in the center or on the left of the political spectrum. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that the governing coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU) and Free Democrats (FDP) is a center-right government which has been in power since unification. This government, and Chancellor Kohl especially, are generally credited with having been the most decisive in the determination to unify the two Germanies after 1989. Walz' (1996b) analysis for Germany showed that persons who identified with a government party are more likely to have trust in institutions than is the case for supporters of the opposition parties. Since CDU/FDP sympathizers are ideologically more on the right, ideologically right placement has a positive effect on trust in institutions. We expect the adolescents in our sample to exhibit the same characteristics.

Unification. Two items make up the index "unification:" unification as reason for joy rather than concern, and preference for unification over continuation of an independent East Germany. The unification index is specific to Germany and as such has not been examined in the literature on socioeconomic and political transformations in eastern Europe. For reasons similar to the ones reviewed in the preceding section, it can be expected that a pro-unification attitude is compatible with trust in the current political institutions in Germany, for those who welcome unification are also more likely to embrace the institutions of the new political order. We therefore anticipate that adolescents with pro-unification attitudes will have more trust in institutions than do those adolescents who have more reservations toward unification.

Relative socioeconomic standing. Social and economic transformations always result in differential outcomes for individuals. Not all persons gain similarly, and there are winners and losers in each transformation. An individual's transformation experience is relevant here, for it has been found that persons who feel deprived have less trust in social institutions than do others (Abranaval and Busch 1975). As one indicator of individual change since unification, we asked

the respondents if they were doing better or worse at the time of the survey as compared to their situation prior to unification. "Winners" of the transformation are more likely to provide support for the social institutions of the new system that made them winners than are persons for whom nothing changed or who lost out during the transformation. We dichotomized the variable by combining adolescents who reported no change with those who said that they were doing worse than before. Accordingly, adolescents who say that they are doing better now can be expected to have more trust in social institutions than adolescents who have fared less well.

4 Results

Before presenting the regression estimates, we would like to briefly discuss the role models that were chosen by our respondents in the years under study (1992, 1994, 1996). Our purpose here is to offer the reader a fuller understanding of some of the dynamics of eastern Germany since reunification, at least what kinds of symbols have been important for adolescents who have lived through the unification experience. As will become apparent, the expectations of fame and fortune from the West in the early years have faded, and more adolescents are turning to other symbols in which to attach their expectations and dreams.

In 1992, role models from the world of entertainment (e.g., actors and actresses, athletes, and singers) made up the largest category, followed by parental role models and those considered to be cultural and political persons, such as artists and heads of governments and/or state. In the early years of the transformation process, many adolescents seemed fascinated by symbols of western popular culture and looked to its idols as guiding role models.

By 1994, however, celebrity role models had fallen from 43% of all valid responses to 21%. In addition to the decrease in the attraction of celebrity role models, there also appeared to be a redistribution of celebrity role models from the international arena to German stars, although there are still a few students who chose international stars like Michael Jackson or athletes such as Michael Jordan as role models. German athletes and musicians were chosen as role models with much more frequency than had been the case in 1992. The same can be said of cultural and political figures, though Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi remained popular non-German role models. In 1996, celebrity role models became more popular, again, accounting for 33% of valid responses.

From 1992 to 1994, the percentage of adolescents selecting parents as role models increased from 23 to 50, making parental role models the single largest category. Although that percentage dropped slightly to 44 by 1996, it remained the largest category. Once the initial

euphoria about unification had subsided, adolescents in eastern Germany—as adolescents in many other places—viewed their parents as role models. This is consistent with Rosenberg's (1986) findings that children up to 12 or 13 years of age look to their parents for guidance in many aspects of their lives. It is also in agreement with the 1996 Youth Report (Silbereisen et al. 1996) for Germany, according to which parents are the most important role models for eastern and western German youth.

The variety of role models mentioned by our respondents acts as an indication of the influence of the West on eastern German adolescents, and gives strength to our assertion that eastern German youths, despite their experiences of unification, act much like other adolescents. Many find media persons stars to be the best role models, while a few also attach themselves to political causes, such as the Green movement and German historical figures who have been instrumental in shaping German society. At the same time, for many of these young people parental figures serve as role models, leading us to believe that unification has not affected the family in a way that would confound the role the family plays in socializing adolescents in the trust or mistrust of the institutions now in operation in the former East Germany.

We present the means and standard deviations for the independent variables in Table 2. The results show an average level of trust in socio-political institutions among adolescents that ranges between little trust and some trust during the 1992-96 period. In 1992 about one quarter of the students named one of their parents (or other family members) as a role model. This percentage increased to 50 percent in 1994 and then dropped slightly to 44 percent by 1996. The average age of the students for each of the three waves was slightly over 14 years of age (all were in either 7th or 9th grade). As already mentioned, female adolescents outnumber their male counterparts in both schools where we conducted the surveys, and this imbalance is reflected in the sex-composition of the respondents. The self-placement on the vertical stratification measure showed strong stability for the period, with most students placing themselves just above the middle of scale. Gymnasium students outnumbered students from the Regelschule by about 3-to-1, reflecting the fact that as the only Gymnasium in the county, this school was much larger than the Regelschule that we surveyed.⁷ Students became less interested in politics during the period 1992-96, with those reporting "no interest in politics" gaining with each survey to reach about one-third of all adolescents. The students, on average, were slightly to the left of center (=50) of the spectrum of political ideology in 1992 and moved further left in the following two survey

⁷ There were five parallel classes in each Gymnasium grade compared to only two classes in each Regelschule grade.

waves. The mean factor scores for the factor "unification" are not substantively interesting; however, we can report here information about the two underlying items for this factor (see appendix). Over 40 percent of the adolescents stated in 1992 and 1996 that unification was an occasion of joy for them, with this percent falling to 36 in 1994; similarly, over one half of all adolescents in 1992 (and 43-45 percent in 1994-96, respectively) preferred unification to the continuation of an independent East Germany. During the entire period, the percentage of adolescents stating that unification is a cause of concern for them remained very small, as did the percentage of those who said that they would have preferred an independent East Germany. Finally, throughout the three surveys, well over one half of all adolescents reported that they were doing better than they did prior to unification, although this percentage declined steadily from 1992 to 1996.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables

Variables	1992	1994	1996
Trust (5-item index)			
Mean	2.45	2.30	2.37
SD	.51	.52	.48
Role Model			
Mean	.23	.50	.44
SD	.42	.50	.50
Left-Right Self Placement			
Mean	48.81	43.90	42.33
SD	15.30	16.86	15.88
Interest in Politics			
Mean	1.80	1.72	1.68
SD	.40	.45	.47
Stratification			
Mean	6.28	6.34	6.49
SD	1.39	1.43	1.46
Sex			
Mean	1.62	1.63	1.58
SD	.49	.48	.50
Age			
Mean	14.05	14.14	14.13
SD	1.02	1.08	1.04
School Type			
Mean	1.72	1.75	1.79
SD	.45	.43	.41
Unification			
Mean	2.34	2.22	2.25
SD	.59	.65	.64
Socioeconomic Situation			
Mean	1.76	1.66	1.60
SD	.43	.48	.49
N	181	166	193

Table 3 presents descriptive information about the level of trust in the five institutions that form the factor institutions as the dependent variable: the military, laws, police, parliament (Bundestag or lower house), and public administration (but not the government proper). This table contains the percentage of those adolescents saying that they have either "quite a lot" or "a lot" of trust in these institutions. The findings show that adolescents place far more trust in the military, the laws, and the police than they did in parliament and public administration. With the exception of 1992 when the level of trust in the police and in parliament were similar (43.3 percent and 42.9 percent, respectively), there is a substantial gap in the level of trust between military, laws, and police, on the hand, and parliament and public administration, on the other hand. Furthermore, the military was the only institution which received more trust in 1996 than in 1992. These results are consistent with changes in the level of trust reported by Walz (1996b) for all of eastern Germany. He, too, found that the level of trust decreased between 1992 and 1995 before it increased again, and that the military and the police were the two institutions in which eastern Germans placed the most trust.

Table 3. Level of Trust by Adolescents in Selected Institutions, 1992-96 (% of respondents stating "quite a lot" and "a lot" of trust)

Institutions	1992	1994	1996
Military	55.5	52.9	59.9
Laws	66.4	47.3	45.2
Police	51.8	43.3	50.5
Parliament	42.9	23.4	24.1
Public Administration	30.5	27.4	30.7

We report the results of our regression analyses in Table 4. Our specified model explains between 16 and 22 percent of the variance in trust in socio-political institutions expressed by adolescents which were close to 14 years of age. The analysis of all important residual plots showed no indications of major violations of the linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions connected with regression models. The proportions of variance independent of the other predictors is not less than two thirds in all three models; and the independent variables present no problems of multicollinearity in any of the models.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients: Unstandardized and Standardized
(Standard error in Parenthesis)

Variables	1992	1994	1996
Role Model			
b	.169*	.249***	.224***
β	.139	.241	.231
se	(.085)	(.075)	(.065)
Left-Right Self Placement			
b	-.007*	.003	.002
β	-.203	.095	.080
se	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Interest in Politics			
b	-.029	.028	.046
β	-.023	.024	.044
se	(.092)	(.082)	(.068)
Stratification			
b	-.015	.029	.036
β	-.041	.081	.107
se	(.026)	(.026)	(.022)
Sex			
b	.012	-.176*	-.220**
β	.012	-.164	-.226
se	(.074)	(.078)	(.065)
Age			
b	.002	-.102**	-.041
β	.005	-.213	-.089
se	(.036)	(.035)	(.031)
School Type			
b	.197*	.135	.107
β	.173	.113	.090
se	(.084)	(.087)	(.081)
Unification			
b	.181**	.241**	.212***
β	.208	.268	.281
se	(.070)	(.067)	(.056)
Socioeconomic Situation			
b	.128	-.042	-.044
β	.107	-.038	-.045
se	(.092)	(.098)	(.071)
Constant			
b	1.813*	2.896***	2.191***
se	(.560)	(.629)	(.541)
Adjusted R-square	.163	.219	.195
N	181	166	193

* p < .05

** p < .01

***p < .001

The model estimates are consistent for all three years; although a variable might be statistically significant in one year and not significant in another year, in no case does a statistically

significant variable have opposite effects in the three survey waves.

The findings support our argument that students with parental role models have more trust in institutions than do students with other role models. Role model is the only variable besides the unification factor that is statistically significant in all three survey waves. The effects of both variables also become stronger between 1992 and 1994; since we are holding the respondents's age range constant, this finding suggests that the period 1992-94 made a difference for the importance of role model and unification for institutional trust. Parental attachment in terms of choosing parents as role models clearly becomes more important for institutional trust among adolescents as the transformation process progresses. Similarly, with increasing number of years since unification, positive attitudes toward unification became a more important factor for trust in socio-political institutions. Although the effects of role model and unification dropped slightly by 1996, they remain substantially higher than they were for 1992.

The results for the other control variables, where statistically significant, exhibit the expected directions. Given the small variance in age (all respondents were either in the 7th or 9th grade), it is not surprising that age does not tend to have an effect on institutional trust. In the year where it is significant (1994), however, it is in the expected direction: younger adolescents have more trust in institutions than their older peers. We had no expectations regarding the effect of sex on institutional trust. The results show that in both 1994 and 1996 males exhibited more trust in institutions than females. We suspect that this is related to the specific types of institutions examined here: both the military and the police offer more employment opportunities for men than for women, which makes it easier for male adolescents to identify with, and to develop trust in them than is the case for female adolescents. To a lesser extent, this also applies to the laws (especially if that is interpreted as the courts by some respondents) and parliament.

Where adolescents place their families on a vertical social-status scale has no effect on the level of trust in institutions. Attendance at the Gymnasium had a positive effect on trust in institutions in 1992, but this effect disappeared in the subsequent years.

Our results showed no effect of interest in politics on trust in institutions, whereas previous studies had found a negative effect of political alienation on trust. This difference could be due to at least two reasons. First, interest in politics as a single indicator is probably not an adequate measure of political alienation. Second, most studies of the effects of political alienation addressed adults; it is possible that political alienation is not a determining factor for adolescents concerning trust in institutions. The only other control variable that turned out to be a significant factor for adolescents' trust in institutions is ideological identification in 1992. As anticipated, students who

tend towards the right of the political spectrum were more likely to trust institutions than centrist or left-leaning students. However, the effect of ideological identification disappeared after 1992. Finally, contrary to previous findings about the negative effect of relative deprivation on institutional trust, the level of trust in institutions among adolescents does not vary by how they compare their current circumstances with the situation prior to unification.

In view of previous research findings that parents and their offspring share general political orientations, although not necessarily specific political preferences, we examined the correlations of father's, mothers', and children's trust in socio-political institutions. While there are strong positive correlations between trust in institutions between fathers and mothers, the correlations are much weaker between parents' and children's trust in institutions; only in 1996 are the parent-child correlations statistically significant. In spite of these weak correlations, we decided to rerun the models with fathers' and mothers' trust in socio-political institutions included separately. In none of the six models did either parents' trust have any statistically significant effect on trust in socio-political institutions by their offspring, nor did it reduce the effect of role model on adolescents' trust to any large extent.⁸

5 Discussion

It has been our intention to show that attachments within the family context can have an impact on how children approach their social surroundings, especially concerning political attitudes. We found that studies based solely on family structure were lacking in explanatory power, especially given current trends concerning these structures. In our view, a child or adolescent must view his parent(s) as someone to look up to before we could say the family has an influence on such attitudes as trust in political institutions. Our results support this view, even in a period of great political upheaval, as happened in eastern Germany after 1989.

Our model results showed that two predictors –role model and attitudes towards unification– accounted for much of the explained variance in institutional trust for all three models.

These two factors represent very different processes. Role model is one indicator of how the child relates to his parents. Choosing parents as role models signifies that children view their parents in positive ways and are more likely to be guided by them than children specifying non-parental role models. According to previous research, having parents as role models can be viewed

⁸ Because of the small sample size, we did not include parents' trust in the models presented here. Those results, however, are available from the authors.

as an attachment to parents and acceptance of their authority that carries over to also accepting the authority of socio-political institutions. The influence on trust of a positive view of unification, on the other hand, is a reflection of the way social change affects the political views of youth. The present analysis covers a period of great turmoil and political re-orientation in eastern Germany. When East Germany joined the Federal Republic, it also embraced its system of liberal democracy and that system's socio-political institutions. We included an adolescent's view of unification in the model because of our belief that those who welcome unification are also more likely to embrace and have trust in the institutions of the new Germany. To make the case for the importance of parental role model, we needed to assess its effect on institutional trust net of the likely strong influence of viewing unification in positive terms. As the findings show, parental role model remains an important factor in having institutional trust even when view towards unification is included in the analysis.

Other control variables, such as social strata, socioeconomic situation, and school type also did not explain away the importance of parental role model. This is a clear indication that the family plays a significant role in determining the trust of adolescents in socio-political institutions. That is not a new finding, of course; as Hess (1963:555) noted over thirty years ago, "the family may be critical in the socialization of attitudes towards [political] authority." We note with interest the similarity of our findings despite dramatic changes in family structure during the past 30 years; the similar findings, furthermore, were obtained in quite different societies. While much research during the past three decades focused on situational and institutional factors, the results presented here show the relevance of viewing parents as role models as a predictor of trust in socio-political institutions. We therefore believe that future studies of political attitudes and trust among adolescents would benefit from an inclusion of their attachments.

APPENDIX: Operationalization of Variables and Scale Construction

1. TRUST IN AUTHORITARIAN/LAW AND ORDER INSTITUTIONS (Dependent Variable). Please tell me for each of the following institutions, how much trust you have in it, do you trust it a great deal, some, little, or do you have no trust in it at all? (1= no trust at all; 2=little trust; 3=some trust; and 4=a lot of trust.) We summed the responses to the five questions and divided the sum by 5, yielding index score ranging from 1 (=no trust at all) to 4 (=a lot of trust).
2. ROLE MODEL. Who is your most important role model? (Categories collapsed into 1 = Parent/Family, 0 = Other; None and missing values not included.)
3. LEFT-RIGHT SELF PLACEMENT. Parties are sometimes divided up according to whether they are left, in the middle, or right. How would you describe your own political position, where on this [100-point] scale would you place yourself?
4. INTEREST IN POLITICS. In general, are you interested in politics? Yes, not particularly, not at all. These three categories were recoded 0 = no interest at all, 1 = at least some interest.
5. STRATIFICATION. There are population groups in our society which are on top and others which are rather at the bottom. Here is a tape measure that runs from top to bottom. If you think about yourself, where on this tape measure would you place yourself? 10-point scale.
6. SEX. 1 = Male, 2 = female.
7. AGE. Coded in single years.
8. SCHOOL TYPE. Type of school attending. 1 = High School (*Gymnasium*), 0 = Middle School (*Regelschule*).
9. UNIFICATION. This variable is an index, combining the following items:
 - A. Is the German unification more an occasion for joy or concern for you?
1=concern, 2=undecided, 3=joy
 - B. Given your experiences after 1989, what would you prefer today: reunification or an independent GDR? 1=GDR, 2=undecided, 3=unification.We added the values for these two items and divided the sum by 2, yielding a total of 6 possible values (1, 1.5, ..., 2.5, and 3).
10. RELATIVE SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION. Would you say that in comparison with the year 1989 you are now doing better or worse? 1 = better, 0 = no difference or worse.

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